

Fort Keogh, Livestock and Range Research Station
3 Miles West on Highway 10
Miles City
Custer County
Montana

HABS No. MT-76-C

HABS
MONT,
9-MILCI,
3-C-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
FORT KEOGH LIVESTOCK AND RANGE RESEARCH STATION

HABS
MONT,
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I. INTRODUCTION

Location: 3 miles west of Miles City, Custer County, Montana
on U.S. Highway 10.

Latitude: North 46°, 22' 30"

Longitude: West 105°, 53' 30"

Township, Range,
Section: T.7N, R47E., Sect. 7

Date of Construction: 1877 and 1879 (Modified in 1934)

Present Owner: U.S. Department of Agriculture
Agricultural Research Service
Northern Plains Area
2625 Redwing Road, Suite 350
Fort Collins, CO 80526

Present Use: Unoccupied. Residual artifact of the original Fort
Keogh Military Reservation. Present use of the
facility is as a research laboratory administered
by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The mission
of this laboratory is to improve efficiency of
range beef cattle productivity in the Northern
Great Plains.

Significance: The two officers quarters built in 1877 and 1879,
the parade grounds, a wagon shed built in 1883, the
flag pole erected in 1887 and seven other
facilities erected later are the remaining on site
vintage structures of the original Fort Keogh
Military Reservation. This historic site is under
jurisdiction of the U.S. Department of Agriculture,
Agricultural Research Service. The original fort
was militarily significant in suppression of the
Indians following the Battle of the Little
Bighorn. It evolved from that period to an
important Remount Station prior to, during and
following World War I. From there it evolved into
a significant Agriculture Research Station. Ft.
Keogh contributed to the early settlement of the
west and stability of Southeastern Montana and the
Northern Great Plains.

Report Prepared by: Dr. Pat O. Currie, USDA-ARS, Miles City, MT.

II. HISTORY

A. ESTABLISHMENT OF FORT KEOGH

The Custer Massacre of June 25, 1876 was the spring-board for the establishment of Fort Keogh as an Army cavalry post and led to the founding of Miles City, Montana. In 1879, Miles City was designated the county seat of Custer County and the first court session was held there in May 1879.

Congress established the Fort Keogh Military Reservation, July 22, 1876. Fort Keogh was named after Captain Miles Keogh, an adjutant to General George Custer. Establishment and early development of Fort Keogh was under the direction of Colonel Nelson A. Miles who later in his career became General Miles. The Fort was constructed while military personnel established and occupied a temporary cantonment.

A Lieutenant Colonel Whistler had charge of selecting the site for Tongue River Cantonment No. 1, and of constructing the temporary buildings that comprised that outpost. Work began on August 28, with such materials as could be obtained in the area, supplemented by some brought overland in wagons. The site was on the south side of the Yellowstone and the west side of the Tongue rivers in the angle formed by their confluence.

Cottonwood poles set on end, stockade style, formed the walls of the huts that served as barracks. Poles were sunk into a trench, chinked with mud, and topped with horizontal logs on which rested a roof of poles and earth. There was one exception: Colonel Miles's headquarters was made of squared logs laid horizontally. Some of those who occupied the cantonment that first winter spoke of it as being dark, dismal, and vermin-infested. However, Colonel Miles was proud of the place and the speed with which it had been built. The mud chinking and dirt roofs melted in heavy rains and ran down the walls, yet the structures were warm enough for the use that was made of them.

The site for permanent Fort Keogh, as chosen by Miles, was officially described as "situated on the right bank of the Yellowstone River, two miles above the mouth of the Tongue...on a solid elevation about ten feet above the remainder of the Yellowstone and Tongue River bottom...altitude 2,530 feet above sea level...area of reservation about 90 square miles."

In 1877, as the "spring rise" brought the Yellowstone up to a navigable level, the finishing lumber, doors, windows, shingles, hardware, and other materials for the fort buildings came by steamboat from the mouth of the Yellowstone, where they had waited out the winter. With them came artisans to help with the construction

job. The river shipments were supplemented by overland wagon trains. Sawmills buzzed in the pine hills east of the present site of Miles City on an area called Government Hill.

The new post was informally known as Fort Keogh from the time of its inception, but the name did not become official until November 8, 1878. In naming the post, the army paid tribute to Captain Miles Walter Keogh, of I Troop, Seventh Cavalry, who had died with Custer at the Battle of the Little Bighorn, June 25, 1876.

Keogh was born in 1840, in Ireland, the son of a Royal Irish Lancer whose station was in a town near Limerick known by a name now forever associated with the Seventh Cavalry--"Garry Owen." Miles Keogh served in the French and Italian armies and in the Papal Zouaves before coming to America in 1862, where he volunteered for the Union Army. He was mustered-out in 1866 as brevet lieutenant colonel, re-enlisted, and ten years later was killed by the Indians. It was Captain Keogh's horse, Comanche, which was found alive on the Little Big Horn battlefield, nursed back to health despite his seven wounds, and lived for fifteen more years before being preserved as an exhibit in the museum at the University of Kansas, at Lawrence.

To the Northern Cheyennes, who had long used the Fort Keogh site as a camping ground and whose name for the Yellowstone was Elk River, the new installation was known as the Elk River Fort.

The fort was an eleven-company post, and was costly to build at that period in history. The Quartermaster General's report to the Secretary of War for 1877 predicted that the expense of transporting materials to the site would "much exceed" costs of construction and materials. This apparently did not prove to be the case, but transportation was the largest of the three items, and the amount spent on Fort Keogh alone in two years nearly equaled the entire \$200,000 originally appropriated in 1876 for Forts Keogh and Custer.

The Quartermaster General's report for 1877 listed the following buildings for Keogh with the "expected cost" of each:

| | |
|--|--------------|
| Two cavalry barracks for six companies | \$ 20,800.00 |
| Two infantry barracks for four companies | 10,000.00 |
| One infantry barrack for one company | 3,000.00 |
| One building as quarters for commander | 3,300.00 |
| Thirteen buildings, company and staff officers | 39,000.00 |
| One commissary warehouse | 2,500.00 |
| One quartermaster storehouse | 2,200.00 |
| One bake house | 1,000.00 |
| Stables and corral for cavalry horses | 10,000.00 |
| Stables and corral from trains | 2,000.00 |
| Office of commander | 2,000.00 |
| Guard house | 2,000.00 |
| Granary for forage | 2,200.00 |

\$100,000.00

There is in the National Archives a scale drawing, marked "Plan of Fort Keogh, M.T.," prepared under direction of First Lieutenant Edward Maguire of the army engineers, and dated September 7, 1878. On the edge of this drawing is written in ink an unsigned statement that the cost of Fort Keogh up to September 17, 1878 had been:

| | |
|----------------|--------------|
| Materials | \$ 51,131.90 |
| Transportation | 74,192.81 |
| Labor | 57,975.72 |
| | <hr/> |
| | \$183,300.43 |

On another edge of the plan in longhand--together with references to what apparently were inspection reports--is written a statement of buildings completed as of September 17, 1878. These were: commanding officer's quarters; fourteen sets of company officers' quarters (the drawing itself shows thirteen); three sets of infantry barracks, capacity three hundred men; one cavalry barrack, two hundred men; one granary, capacity seven hundred tons; quartermaster's storehouse; commissary storehouse; bakery; quartermaster's office; adjutant's office; and guardhouse. Buildings yet to be completed at that time, as recorded on the plan, were a hospital ("can be occupied now, will be completed in two months"), two cavalry barracks ("ready for use in a month or less"), twelve sets of officers' quarters ("ready for use in about three weeks"), four cavalry stables ("ready in ten days"), and a corral ("virtually finished").

In addition to the foregoing the 1878 diagram of the fort shows the following contemplated buildings, some of which were never constructed: school teacher's house, post trader's buildings, sinks (latrines), bandmaster's quarters, ordinance officer's quarters, powder magazine, civilian employees' mess, blacksmith shop, post headquarters, regimental district headquarters and a photographer's gallery.

Most western army posts were rectangular. Keogh was one of a few (Fort D.A. Russell, Wyoming was another) built around a diamond-shaped parade ground. Officer's quarters radiated in two directions from those of the commanding officer, and barracks for the men formed the other two sides of the diamond, converging at the east point. The cavalry stables were to the south of this point, and other buildings were scattered about the area.

Keogh looked somewhat un-fortlike. It was more like a small town. The buildings were of wood, painted brown, with red shingle roofs. Officers' quarters were two story duplexes and had dormer windows, small yards, and porches. There was no wall about the fort, though Miles for a time had long ricks of four-foot cordwood placed at strategic points where they might prove useful in event of an attack, which never came.

During the period from 1876 to 1881, Colonel Miles spent most of his time in the field, trying to gather the various Indian tribes onto reservations. He campaigned year round, instead of staying in camp all winter. The soldiers of his 5th Infantry were sometimes mounted on captured Indian ponies. Their way of life and the garb they donned to combat the cold make this an interesting chapter in military history. The history of the town of Miles City is interwoven with the story of the Fort.

Tradesmen struggled to provide services to the military. Transportation was subject to the whims of nature. Military and civilians alike depended on the steamboats arriving on the June rise of the Yellowstone River and land transport over hostile territory on bad roads.

The area around Fort Keogh had also been explored earlier by Captain William Clark (of the Lewis and Clark expedition) who camped on the bank of the Yellowstone River near the mouth of the Tongue River on July 29, 1806. Trappers and Indians had roamed the area. It was the pressure exerted by white men searching for gold in western Montana and the Black Hills of South Dakota that eventually brought events to a head and made a permanent military presence necessary. The railroads were paramount in the settlement and development of the west and also played a part in the history of the area. In later periods, Fort Keogh served as a remount station and both it and its successor, the agricultural research station, were important and integral components in the development of this historic site.

In 1907, all infantry troops were withdrawn and in 1910 Fort Keogh became a Remount Station for the U.S. Army. This Remount Station was very active in World War I. During this period more horses (recorded at between 20 and 30 thousand) were processed here than at any other army post in the United States. Horses were shipped to other armies worldwide. In 1922, the Army closed the Remount Station and relinquished the land. The Fort Keogh military withdrawal was terminated on February 2, 1924. By an Act of Congress dated April 15, 1924 (43 Sta. 99) jurisdiction of the Fort Keogh Military Reservation was transferred to the U.S. Department of Agriculture for experiments in stock raising and growing of forage crops. The size of the original Fort Keogh Military Reservation was approximately 100 square miles or 64,000 acres. The Fort Keogh Livestock and Range Research Station now occupies about 56,500 acres. In 1878, a large piece of land east of the Tongue River was released by the Army and is now the present site of the City of Miles City. Since that time, additional land has been released for the Miles City industrial sites, Custer County fairgrounds, the warm-water fish hatchery and Spotted Eagle Recreation Area. Fort Keogh is unique because it is still in use after more than 100 years to serve the vast ranching areas of southeastern Montana and the surrounding Northern Great Plains.

III. THE BUILDINGS

A. SITE DESCRIPTION

The two Officers Quarters are located on a relatively level site on the southwest side of the original Parade Grounds at Fort Keogh. All other major structures with the exception of a two-story frame barracks are gone from the site. Many of the trees that lined the Parade Grounds and that were located in the front, side, and back of the structure still exist. The two structures are identified as Officers Quarters A" (HABS NO: MT 76-A) which occupies the south and/or east position of the 2 remaining buildings in Officers Row. Officers Quarters B (HABS NO: MT 76-B) is the building to the north and/or west.

B. BUILDING DESCRIPTION

The two buildings, Quarters A and Quarters B, are similar in description. Differences will be noted.

The buildings are two-story wood frame duplex structures with wood shingled mansard roofs. The roofs are hipped on the top. There are two dormers on each side of the mansard roof with 6 over 6 double-hung wood windows in each. The dormers have curved metal template roofs. There are four corbeled brick chimneys on each building. The eave is boxed out flat with a straight fascia and a galvanized tin flashing cap.

Foundations consist of heavy timber beams supported by brick piers. The beams run generally north and south and support the structure in thirds. The piers support the beam at approximately 6 to 8 foot intervals on center.

Exterior walls of the structures have clapboard siding. The windows are 6 over 6 double-hung with wood sash and frame. The exterior doors are wood raised panels with wood screen doors.

There is a wood screened porch running the full length of the front of each structure with an open center entry and wood steps. As an addition, Quarters A has three rooms on the back of the main structure with a wood shingled hip roof. The walls, windows and doors have materials similar to the main structure. There is a basement with a boiler under the east two-thirds of the addition. A brick chimney for the boiler is attached to the back of the structure. Quarters B has two back entrance additions attached to it. These two additions have a wood shingled gable roof and use materials similar to the main structure.

The interior plans consist of a central entrance stairway to the second floor. Each side of the duplex on the first floor has a front parlor and a back parlor with a common fireplace. There is a dining room, a kitchen, and storage or entrance rooms behind the back parlor. On the second floor are the bedrooms, including the servants' quarters (see figures and photographic records).

C. PRESENT CONDITION OFFICERS QUARTERS A

FOUNDATION

Inspection of the crawl space under the structure revealed that at the time the heating and plumbing were installed, trenches were dug in between the support piers to run the pipes. This caused undermining of the piers and collapse of a few of the supports. Without regard to the structural integrity of this foundation, it is causing settlement in the structure.

EXTERIOR WALLS

Inspection of the wall surface revealed that there is very little paint left on the surface and the clapboards are weathering. The nails are also rusting because of no paint protection, thus they are being forced out of the wood. The wood base skirt is rotted because of the organic material that has built up around the structure. Some clapboards have rotted out or are missing because of deterioration at the steps or exit stairways.

PORCH

Inspection of the porch revealed that some of the supports have fallen away, causing some settlement on the front center section. The columns supporting the roof are also unstable in the center area. There are some rotted floor board and ceiling boards along the front edge of the porch.

WINDOWS AND DOORS

Inspection of the windows in the structure revealed the frame, trim and sash are weathering causing warping of materials and deterioration of the windows. The glass is missing in some cases, as a result of vandals throwing rocks through the windows. The bottom windows have been boarded up.

Exterior doors are in good condition. The stiles and rails are loose and paint is deteriorating.

ROOF

Inspection of the mansard roof revealed that the structure is in good shape. However, the wood shingles are in bad shape and are causing some water penetration into the structure. The valley and peak are also deteriorating, causing water to penetrate the structure. There is some rot because of water dripping on the fascia and penetrating into the soffit.

The brick chimneys on top of the roof are also deteriorating with the top four or five courses coming apart.

The brick boiler chimney on the rear of the structure is in poor condition. The base has completely deteriorated. Even though metal ties are holding the chimney to the structure, it is in danger of collapse.

INTERIOR

The interior of the structure was inspected to find out the condition of the structure and to determine the problems that may occur because of what is happening in the rest of the structure. There has been some movement in the structure, cracks, floor settlement, and so on, because of the foundation problems.

The interior has been vandalized, some elements have been removed, and there has been some damage occurring because the building has not been heated for a number of years. Some of the interior plaster and paint has deteriorated because of these conditions.

GENERAL

Officers Quarters A generally is in fair condition, with the exception of the poor foundation. Something will have to be done in the immediate future to stop the potential major deterioration of the structure.

PRESENT CONDITION OFFICER QUARTERS B

FOUNDATION

Inspection of the crawl space under the structure revealed that the foundation is in good shape. The area has not been disturbed, the ground seems to be dry, and the brick piers are in good shape. The heavy timber beams, as well as the floor joists, also seem to be in good shape.

The chimney foundation in the northwest corner has cracked and a corner has fallen out, but it seems to still be in good shape structurally.

EXTERIOR WALLS

Inspection of the wall surface revealed that the walls are in fairly good shape because of the amount of paint that is still left on the structure. The clapboards seem to be securely attached to the structure, with few exceptions. The wood base skirt is rotted because of the organic material that has built up around the structure.

PORCH

Inspection of the porch revealed that it is in poor condition. The front of the porch has fallen at the center near the steps and at the northwest corner. This is causing the porch, including the roof, to pull away from the main structure. The floor boards and porch railing are rotted and have fallen away.

WINDOWS AND DOORS

Inspection of the windows in the structure revealed that the frame, trim and sash are weathering, causing warping of materials and deterioration of the windows. The glass is missing in some cases, as a result of vandals throwing rocks through the windows. The bottom windows have been boarded up.

The exterior doors are in good condition. The stiles and rails are loose and the paint is deteriorating.

ROOF

Inspection of the mansard roof revealed that the front half of the roof structure is in good shape, but that the back half is deteriorating rapidly because of the missing sections of roof. The shingles and sheathing are gone in some locations, allowing water into the roof structure. Some structural members have collapsed and some of the existing sheathing is rotted. The water is causing damage to the rooms below.

The wood shingles on the whole roof are in bad shape and are causing some water penetration into the structure and the eave is deteriorating.

The brick chimneys on top of the roof are also deteriorating with the top four or five courses coming apart.

INTERIOR

The interior of the structure was inspected to find out the condition of the structure and to determine the problems that may occur because of what is happening in the rest of the structure. There has been considerable damage to walls and floors in both the first and second floors.

The interior has been vandalized, some elements have been removed, and there has been some damage occurring because the building has not been heated for a number of years. Some of the interior plaster and paint has deteriorated because of these conditions.

GENERAL

The foundation and walls of Officers Quarters B are generally in good shape. However, the roof, porch and interior are deteriorating very rapidly.

IV. OWNERSHIP AND FUTURE

The General Nelson A. Miles Foundation (GNAMF), a historical and educational foundation under charter granted by the State of Montana, has formally requested permission to acquire and restore Officers Quarters A, to its original condition as designated in the James R. Macdonald's 1980 survey.

They plan a multipurpose use for the building. On the first floor of the building, the GNAMF plans on establishing the General Nelson A. Miles Library and Historical Research Center, a Visitors Center for both Eastern Montana and Miles City, a Fort Keogh Historical Center, a Montana Gift Shop and a Theatre which can be used both in conjunction with the visitors center as well as a Community Theatre and meeting room. The second floor of the building will house offices of community organizations such as the General Miles Foundation and other organizations within the community.

As historic preservation of the Officer's Quarters and Parade grounds is unfeasible at their present site, due to the needs of the Agricultural Research Station. The GNAMF requested to have the building moved to a site along old highway 10 between the eastern entrance to Fort Keogh and the Miles City Livestock Center but still on Fort Keogh Grounds. Their intentions are to eventually reconstruct portions of the original Fort and Parade Grounds as an Eastern Montana Historical Park. The GNAM Foundation has been issued a revocable permit by Agricultural Research Service for this purpose and for visitors parking.

The restoration will comply with the Secretary of the Interiors Guidelines for Historic Preservation Projects, using as much of the original type materials as is feasible today. The Foundation will restore the building to its original external appearance, but plan to insulate the structure and install a modern heating system as well as modern devices for protection against vandals and fire. Effort will be made to maintain the original character of the building while keeping it in use.

The General Nelson A. Miles Foundation plans, upon receipt of the building at its new site, to immediately preserve it from further deterioration by placing a new roof on the structure and to weatherproof the building. They currently have fund raising projects underway within the community to achieve this goal. However, it is their opinion that the resources within Miles City are too limited at this time to

immediately permit complete restoration. Therefore, they will have to go beyond this environs to raise necessary funds. The GNAMP plan to establish an Eastern Montana Visitors Center and Historic Park, and hopefully will be eligible for State funding. Also, they will explore Federal Funding for historical preservation as well as private Corporate Sponsorship for the project. Members of the community are prepared to donate their labor and materials to achieve the stated goals. The Foundation will make a bonafide effort to restore this building.

Officers Quarters B will also be moved and will be used in the restoration of building A and as a source of materials to help build a replica of General Nelson A. Miles original house.

To achieve this goal the Agricultural Research Service, USDA has granted a revocable permit, provided funding and contracted for moving the buildings, and will issue the General Nelson A. Miles Foundation title to the buildings in conformance with USDA and Historical Preservation standards.

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